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SUBJECT: ANNUAL OVERSEAS SECURITY ADVISORY COUNCIL (OSAC) CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT

REF: 08 State 132056

## I. Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Budapest is rated as a medium threat post for crime. Although still appreciably low by U.S. standards, Hungary's overall crime rate for 2008 remained consistent with 2007 levels. Property crimes (theft) made up 60 percent of total crimes. Violent crimes increased slightly from 2006 and 2007 statistics. Crimes committed against Americans are based on opportunities; the criminal threat is not anti-American.

Street crimes, particularly pick-pocketing, petty thefts from persons, thefts from unattended vehicles, and vandalism, are the most frequently reported. Budapest's major train stations and the public transportation (tram, subway, and bus) system are popular venues for such thefts.

Small, fractional fringe element groups of Neo-Nazis and a similarly small skinhead presence are present in Hungarian society but rarely adversely impact foreigners. Their activities, particularly rallies, are strictly limited and monitored by police.

The organized crime groups in Hungary control all prostitution, stolen cars rings, gambling, and narcotics trafficking. The organized crime division of the Hungarian National Police, in partnership with a U.S. Embassy-supported task force of U.S. law enforcement officers, is combating the problem of organized crime.

In 2008, the Embassy Consular Section received reports from private American citizens who were victims of the following crimes:

Stolen Passports:	78
Scams:	16
Violent crime:	3
Theft/break-ins:	15

## II. Political Violence

Hungary enjoys a relatively stable security environment. There have been no acts of terrorism directed against American interests in Hungary.

Since fall 2006, right wing extremists have used the national holidays in October and March to stage large-scale demonstrations against the Hungarian Government. These demonstrations were related to the fall 2006 riots by right wing extremists reacting to the release of an audiotape in which the prime minister admitted lying to the public about the economy. Demonstrators have clashed with police and used Molotov cocktails and other debris to throw at police who respond with water cannons and tear gas to control the violent situations.

The Magyar Garda (Hungarian Guard), established in August 2007 by Jobbik, a right wing political group, continued to intimidate and conduct anti-Roma activity throughout Hungary. In December 2008, the Budapest Municipal Court dissolved the Magyar Garda Society because of its anti-Roma activity. The court's decision is under appeal by Jobbik.

Another right wing extremist group, the Hungarians' Arrows National Liberation Army, claimed responsibility for firebombing the homes of several Hungarian politicians and the home of the government minister who heads the National Security Services.

Throughout the year, several public announcements and worldwide cautions alerting U.S. citizens traveling and residing abroad to potential safety concerns were issued. Travelers are encouraged to visit the Embassy website at [www.usembassy.hu](http://www.usembassy.hu) for current information.

### III. Post Specific Concerns

Like most of the other countries in Central Europe, Hungary has been identified as a transit country for illegal drugs, coming from Turkey and Asia to various destinations in Europe. Police also report that Hungary is increasingly becoming more of a consumer for illegal drugs, particularly among teens.

Driving in Hungary can be challenging as drivers are aggressive. Recently, the government introduced harsher penalties for speeders and traffic violators and traffic incidents have decreased, but speeding and reckless driving remain a concern.

In the past few years along the Danube and Tisza Rivers, spring flooding has closed roadways and affected low lying towns.

### IV. Police Response

The Hungarian Economics Ministry and the Hungarian National Police set up a hotline for tourists who are scammed at restaurants and clubs. The hotline number is 438-8080, and operates 24 hours a day with English and German language capability. A tourism information line operating 24 hours a day is toll free 06-806-60-044 from Hungary and 605-50-044 from abroad. During the peak tourist season, police patrolling major tourist areas were accompanied by multi-lingual students who assisted with problems or complaints. Police also opened a Tourinform office that operates everyday from 8 AM till 8 PM. It is located downtown at Suto Street 2, District 5 and they are able to receive complaints and render assistance in English and German.

### V. Medical Emergencies

Countrywide Emergency telephone numbers: 104 for emergency ambulance service, 105 for fire emergency, and 107 for police response. Police, ambulance and fire emergency assistance calls have also been consolidated into one telephone number, 112. For emergency/non-emergency patient transportation 311-1666 can be used. The Other ambulance service in Budapest is the Fonix SOS Ambulance Service (200-0100). Hospitals in Budapest include the Trauma Hospital (299-7700) and the National Hematological Institute (455-8100). Additional, updated information is available from the Embassy health unit at 475-4092 during regular business hours.

### VI. Travel Precautions

In Budapest, as in any major cosmopolitan area, a little common sense goes a long way. As a general rule, visitors should be alert to their surroundings and keep control of all personal belongings, especially when in crowded public places like public transportation and open markets.

Reports of over charging at some restaurants, clubs, and nightspots especially in those areas of the city frequented by tourists are not uncommon. The consumption girl scam is still a popular practice in which "recruiters" seek men out to meet with women in the clubs. Those who choose to buy drinks or spend time with the clubs' women are usually charged exorbitant fees. U.S. citizens have reported that club bouncers are intimidating and have escorted club patrons to ATM machines or back to their hotels to obtain money to pay the bills. In 2008, employees at one of these clubs were charged with kidnapping after they forced patrons to withdraw money from an ATM to pay their bill. Policeshould be called immediately, however,

that will not necessarily mean that the customer does not have to pay the bill. Before entering these clubs, customers should ask about prices.

Post strongly recommends that American citizens avoid large public gatherings, especially political rallies and demonstrations, due to the potential for violence.

VII. Further information

U.S. citizens are encouraged to report any situations where they are the victims of personal crime in Hungary to the American Embassy in Budapest. The telephone numbers are 475-4400 (ask for American Citizen Services) during regular business hours, and 475-4703 after hours and on weekends. The RSO Office can be contacted at 475-4918, and MSG Post One at 475-4924.

VIII. OSAC Country Council

Post does not have a formalized OSAC country council, but the RSO Office is readily available whenever a U.S. company wants to discuss security/crime issues. The RSO Office also works with the Embassy's Foreign Commercial Service section on matters affecting the U.S. business community.

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